

## **Results from a Cognitive Interview Evaluation of a Subset of Questions for the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: Round 2**

Stephanie Willson, Kristen Cibelli Hibben, and Kristian Gregory-Lee  
Collaborating Center for Questionnaire Design and Evaluation Research  
National Center for Health Statistics  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

### Introduction

The staff of the National Center for Health Statistics' Collaborating Center for Questionnaire Design and Evaluation Research (CCQDER) conducted a cognitive interview evaluation in support of a redesign of the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS)<sup>1</sup>. NISVS is a periodic survey conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Injury Prevention and Control that collects national and sub-national information on intimate partner violence, sexual violence, and stalking victimization.

The cognitive interview evaluation is an iterative design with two rounds of testing. Results from the first round are documented in a separate report.<sup>2</sup> After the first round of cognitive interviews, modifications were made to both question wording and section ordering. The modifications were then evaluated in a second round of testing. This report documents findings from the second round of cognitive interviews, which includes select questions from three sections of the NISVS survey: stalking, sexual assault, and attempted sexual assault. Emphasis is given to sections or questions that continued to be problematic in terms of response error and silent misunderstandings.

The methodological design of the study is discussed next, followed by the research findings. The cognitive interview test instrument is found in the Appendix.

### Methodology

*Sampling and Respondent Demographics:* As a qualitative evaluation, cognitive interviewing employs a purposive non-random sample whereby individuals are chosen on the basis of characteristics relevant to the questions under investigation. As such, people who have experienced stalking behavior or any type of sexual violence were recruited for the study. In addition, participants were recruited with a goal achieving a demographically diverse and inclusive sample, particularly in terms of race, gender, and educational attainment.

The CCQDER operations staff recruited and screened respondents for interviews. Respondents were recruited from the CCQDER database, and a small number through word-of-mouth. Utilizing the recruitment database seemed to facilitate the interview process and ultimately improve data quality by tapping into preexisting rapport between recruiter and respondent. Because respondents were already familiar with the cognitive interview process and with the recruitment staff, there was an established level of comfort with and trust of the interviewer that proved essential in discussing the sensitive topics of stalking, sexual assault, and attempted sexual assault.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/datasources/nisvs/index.html>

<sup>2</sup> The final report from that study may be found at <https://wwwn.cdc.gov/qbank/report.aspx?1227>.

A total of 20 English-speaking, adult respondents were interviewed. Most respondents self-identified as either male or female, though females constituted a greater percentage of the sample (75%). One respondent identified as non-binary. Sixty percent of the respondents identified as non-Hispanic Black or African American; the remaining 40% identified as non-Hispanic White. In addition, there were a variety of ages, with most respondents aged 30-59. Finally, 45% of the respondents had a high school diploma or less, while the same percentage had either a two- or four-year college degree. Only two respondents had a graduate degree. Table 1 summarizes the sample composition.

<b>Table 1: Demographic Sample Composition (n = 20)</b>		
	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Gender Identity</b>		
Male	4	20%
Female	15	75%
Another Gender Identity	1	5%
<b>Age in Years</b>		
Under 30	1	5%
30 - 39	5	25%
40 - 49	6	30%
50 - 59	5	25%
60 - 69	1	5%
70 and Over	2	10%
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>		
Non-Hispanic Black	12	60%
Non-Hispanic White	8	40%
<b>Educational Attainment</b>		
High School Diploma or Less	9	45%
2- or 4-Year College Degree	9	45%
Graduate Degree	2	10%

*Data collection:* The survey questions are intended to be self-administered online. However, because the questionnaire had not yet been programmed, interviewers read the questions aloud to respondents, as navigation through skip patterns would be too difficult for respondents to follow without computer assistance. However, for certain segments of the test instrument, interviewers shared their screen so that respondents could see portions of the questionnaire. This was done consistently for the introductory text to each section – stalking, sexual assault, and attempted sexual assault – because the instructions were lengthy.

The cognitive interviews were conducted in two parts. First, interviewers read the questions to respondents and recorded their answers. In the second portion, interviewers followed up with retrospective probes to ascertain respondent understandings of the questions and instructions, rationales for their answers, and whether any response error occurred. Interviews were a maximum of 60 minutes in length and took place virtually using the Zoom Internet meeting platform. A \$50 remuneration was mailed to respondents once the interview ended.

Because of the sensitive topics, the interview protocol included augmented safety measures for respondents. At the start of the interview, respondents were reminded first by the recruiter and again

by the interviewer that they could refuse to answer any question or end the interview at any time.<sup>3</sup> Respondents were also offered a safe and discrete way to end the interview should their privacy be compromised at any point during the discussion. Additionally, a list of toll-free help lines was made available to respondents who exhibited any distress or discomfort during the interview. Distress levels were categorized as mild, moderate, or severe according to the Distress Guidance form approved by the Ethics Review Board (ERB). Interviewers were responsible for identifying and reporting moderate or severe distress to the ERB; however, no respondents demonstrated that level of distress during the interviews. In part this was due to interviewer skill in quickly recognizing discomfort in a respondent and refraining from further probing. Additionally, no probing was initiated on any respondent (regardless of their experiences) for questions that ask about sexually explicit acts (i.e., those that ask about oral, vaginal, or anal sex). Discussion of those topics occurred only if introduced by the respondents. Of the 20 respondents, only four exhibited mild distress and were given a copy of helpline telephone numbers and web resources at the end of the interview. Upon showing distress, all four respondents were asked whether they wanted to stop or continue with the interview. All chose to finish the interview, citing the importance of the topic and the need for national data.

*Analysis:* Analysis of interview data included a process similar to the constant comparative method first developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967)<sup>4</sup> and adapted to cognitive interviews by Miller et al. (2014).<sup>5</sup> Data analysis was conducted with the use of Q-Notes,<sup>6</sup> a software application specifically designed for cognitive interview studies. The first stage of analysis occurred within each interview. This involved analyzing a respondent's narrative during probing and comparing it to their survey answers to assess internal consistency, identify response error, and document respondent understanding of the questions and instructions. The second stage of analysis was a comparison of interpretations by question across interviews to identify larger patterns in the question-response process and forms of response error. Lastly, patterns and themes were compared for any subgroup variation, for example, by gender identity.

## Findings

Overall, the questions in this round were an improvement over Round 1. The most significant improvement was the ordering and composition of the sexual assault sections. In Round 1 the topic of sexual assault was divided into different sections. Respondents were confused over the distinction between the section on drug/alcohol-impaired sexual assault (which appeared first) and the section on sexual assault more broadly (which appeared second)<sup>7</sup>. Because the distinction between the two sections was indeterminable to many respondents, they saw the questions as repetitive and confusing.

The flow and logic were less confusing in Round 2 because questions on drug/alcohol-impaired sexual assault were incorporated into the sexual assault section in general, instead of constituting a separate section. When drug/alcohol-impaired assault became a subsection of sexual assault, respondents

---

<sup>3</sup> This procedure is standard for all CCQDER projects but was reiterated to respondents a second time in this project.

<sup>4</sup> Glaser, B. and Strauss, A. (1967) *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Hawthorne, NY: Aldine de Gruyter.

<sup>5</sup> Miller, K., Willson, S., Chepp, V., & Padilla, J.-L. (2014) *Cognitive Interviewing Methodology: A Sociological Approach for Survey Question Evaluation*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

<sup>6</sup> <https://wwwn.cdc.gov/qnotes/>

<sup>7</sup> Findings from Round 1 may be reviewed at <https://wwwn.cdc.gov/qbank/report.aspx?1227>

understood the difference between the concepts, were less likely to see the questions as repetitive, and provided answers that were more aligned with question intent.

It is important again to note that not all individual questions were systematically probed due to the sensitive nature of the topics. Instead, questions were explored on a case-by-case basis depending on a respondent's personal experiences and proclivity to discuss the details of those experiences. Findings are reported within this context.

Several items are asked in similar ways across different sections of the survey, such as respondent age at the time of an event and the relationship of the respondent to the perpetrator. Findings from these questions are documented below. Additionally, certain concepts such as stalking and attempted sexual assault still posed some question-response challenges that are documented next.

### *1. Opportunities for False Negative Responses*

Respondents did not always report all perpetrators in either the stalking questions or the sexual assault or attempted sexual assault sections. This occurred for the following reasons.

Recall: The questions on stalking and unwanted sexual experiences ask respondents how many of these events occurred in their entire life. Hence, one reason respondents may not include all perpetrators is simply recall failure. For example, one respondent reported three stalkers but admitted that recall was challenging. She said, "But it was a long time ago, some of it, too. So, I think that's the only reason it got a little muddled maybe. Because I had to think back." Another respondent paused and thought for a while, then asked, "Like over my lifetime? That is hard to quantify." She finally gave a less-than-confident answer of, "Probably three maybe." This can become more difficult the older a respondent is. For example, one respondent had difficulty and explained, "I was 19. I'm 35 so that was a long time ago." Another respondent who was even older had difficulty providing a number of stalkers. She said, "Remember, I'm 76 this is uh [thinks]...at least 3 through the years."

Experiences Deemed Too Trivial (or Numerous) to Mention: Another opportunity for false negative reports occurs when respondents omit certain experiences from their answers because they are deemed too trivial to report. This occurred, for example, in the stalking section. When asked by the interviewer during probing to confirm her answer of two, one respondent said, "I mean, I think that there were a few times that I had a little stalking going on with a boyfriend that I had. But it was very brief... but I thought maybe we would be here all day if I discussed all of these things." However, when the interviewer asked the respondent about this omitted experience, it seemed worthy of inclusion. In explaining what happened when she tried to break up with her boyfriend, the respondent said, "He was calling me at my job and actually got me fired because he called so much." One time he followed her and tried to run her off the road. "I think that it was for about a month it lasted." *Did he make you feel afraid?*<sup>8</sup> "Yeah. A little bit." *And did he make threats?* "Yeah, and he was drinking real heavily and then I was even more scared because I said, oh great, now he's drinking, and he's vulgar, and just threatening me and following me, and he got me fired from my job..."

Another respondent failed to report an experience with receiving sexually explicit pictures through email. The interviewer attempted to rule out a false negative error and confirm his answer during

---

<sup>8</sup> Text in italics denotes interviewer questions to the respondent during the probing portion of the cognitive interview.

probing. *So, no one ever did anything like this?* "No." *Any that almost crossed the line?* "Yes. A friend had done that. And I talked to her about it, and she apologized. And that was the first and last time." *What was she sending you?* "It was a picture of herself because she had got pierced [in a provocative place]. She wanted my opinion about it, and I told her that's kind of crossing the line with us as friends. I'm dating someone." *But you didn't include that here. Why?* "To be honest with you, I literally just remembered when you asked it again [during probing]." For the respondent this incident was not especially significant. As a result, he neglected to report it because he did not even remember it at first.

Unpleasant Memories: Finally, the topics of these questions are unavoidably sensitive. This can contribute to false negative reporting. In both rounds of testing, some respondents failed to report certain experiences because thinking about them is too unpleasant. For example, in thinking about her experiences with stalking, one respondent said, "To be honest, I've probably blocked some of it out. But once I tap back into it, it's very easy to remember how everything played out." Another respondent did not initially report sexual assault that occurred by her father when she was a teenager but did bring it up with the interviewer during probing. When asked why she did not include this experience in her survey answers she explained, "Because it's so painful, if they [the questions] don't mention it, I don't want to discuss it. That's my personal opinion. If they don't mention it, I'd rather bury that one and let's pass on to what happened after I left home." Another respondent initially reported only one incident of sexual assault but during probing said, "Well, there was one other person. I was traveling by myself, and this happened in Italy." The interviewer reminded the respondent that this survey was intended to be completed online and asked if she thought it would be more comfortable to report such experiences in that context. She said, "No. It doesn't make any difference [how the questions are administered]." In other words, thinking about the experience is the source of unpleasantness, not necessarily the discussion of it with an interviewer or the reporting of it in a survey. Therefore, it is the decision to not to invoke such memories in the first place that is the cause of some underreporting.

Men: Men may experience the behaviors asked about in the survey questions somewhat differently than women. For example, some experiences that men have were not defined by them as being sexually victimized, *per se*. This occurred in the above example of the respondent who failed to report receiving sexually explicit pictures through email. He did not interpret this experience as being victimized; indeed, it was so trivial to him that he almost forgot about it altogether – which led to his failure to report the incident in his survey answer.

Additionally, these results demonstrated that sometimes men were so accustomed to being defined not as the *victim* but as the *perpetrator* of stalking, sexual assault, and attempted sexual assault that they had difficulty staying focused on the idea that these questions are about their experiences as a victim. One male respondent demonstrated this pattern. He had himself been accused of stalking and focused on this experience during the follow-up discussion. A friend took him to court claiming that he was harassing her. The judge threw out the case because the respondent was able to convince the court that he did not know she no longer wanted to hear from him because she never directly communicated this. He said, "I didn't even know that I was harassing her! I didn't even know about anything. One day she just stopped talking to me and I thought that she was just mad at me. Because in our last conversation, she had said I will talk to you later." The respondent did not demonstrate response error, but during probing he was not thinking as much about himself as a victim of stalking (which he did report in his survey answer) as he was as an (alleged) perpetrator. It was clear that his experience as an alleged perpetrator was more salient in his mind than his experience as a victim.

A similar pattern was observed with another respondent who reported no experiences with sexual assault. Response error was not detected; however, probing revealed that he saw men as the primary perpetrators of sexual assault and had a difficult time imagining either women as perpetrators or himself as a victim. Thinking that only men commit this type of violence he said, "Again, I'm straight. So, I've never been in that situation." When answering whether anyone ever attempted unwanted oral sex with him, he further explained, "It's never something that I would think of forcing on somebody. Consequently, I can't think of any woman ever forcing themselves on me to do that...but if a woman enjoys herself and wants to do that, then fine [laughs]." Note that his response includes answering for himself as a perpetrator even though that question was never actually asked of him in either the survey or during probing.

These interpretive trends may lead to systematic underreporting of stalking, sexual assault, and attempted sexual assault among men and, in fact, one respondent confirms the potential for this type of error. One respondent failed to report an attempted sexual assault because he was too focused on being defined as a perpetrator. During probing the interviewer followed up on his answer of 'no' to the attempted sexual assault question in order to assess response error. *Did anyone ever try to push it [sex] further than you wanted?* "I always make sure that we're on the same page." *How so?* "During [sex]. Like I have to literally make sure I get consent. Because I don't want anything to escalate in the wrong manner. So I have to make sure in the way things are nowadays. It has to be a conversation. I have to hear it [consent]. I have to hear it because if that person is really not into it and doesn't want it, I'm stopping right there because for a man nowadays, there is...it's not good." The interviewer noticed that the respondent was not answering for himself as the possible victim of sexual assault and asked the question again, more directly. *So, no one has ever done that to YOU? Taken things further than you wanted?* "Um...let me think. [Pause.] Actually, yes. There was actually one time I was chilling in the car [with] a friend of mine. And she wanted to [have sex] and I didn't. I told her let's just stay friends. I wasn't feeling her to the point where we could get physical. At the time she wasn't taking no for an answer. So that was the first time. Then there was a second time [with the same woman] and I was like, okay, I have to distance myself from her." He initially answered 'no' to all the questions on attempted sexual assault because he was thinking of himself in the possible role of perpetrator and that he always obtains consent and has never sexually assaulted anyone. It somehow did not occur to him that the questions were asking about his experience as a victim of attempted sexual assault.

## *2. Ambiguity in the Concept of Attempted Sexual Assault*

One section of the questionnaire (for both men and women) covers attempted sexual assault. For women the question asks: "How many people have ever used physical force or threats of physical harm to TRY to put their penis in your vagina, mouth, or anus, but it DID NOT happen?"

An attempted sexual assault by definition means that the event did not occur. As a result, respondents must make judgment calls about what specific acts they think the perpetrator was intending to do. Because of this ambiguity, response error can be difficult to assess, but evidence suggests that respondents may include unintended events. For example, one respondent included an experience that might be classified as a false positive error. The interviewer explored this topic during probing. *You said one person [attempted sexual assault]. Tell me about this.* "I had in-school suspension...And you know how you sit at your desk, do your work, and you need help. Teacher came over. And he started rubbing my back, pulling at my pants. And I took a book and I hit him across the head with it." *What happened after that?* "He fell out. I'm 5'10". At that time in high school, I was weighing like 325 pounds and all of it was muscle. So, he laid out. He didn't get up. They had to bring the ambulance." This may not be a false

positive, but it does illustrate the complex nature of sexual aggression and how people internalize such experiences. While in a school detention setting it seems unlikely that the teacher would have actually performed an act of sex as indicated in the question (i.e., vaginal, oral, or anal), the respondent thought this man's behavior to be serious enough to report here. She did not (could not) know his intentions in terms of specific sexual acts, but she did know he was behaving in a sexually unwanted and aggressive way that suggested he wanted – and may have done – something more had she not stopped him.

Instead of a single question similar to the female section, the male section separated each attempted sexual act into three distinct questions as follows:

"In your lifetime, how many people have ever...

...used physical force or threats of physical harm to TRY to put their mouth on your penis, or TRY to make you put your penis in their mouth, but it DID NOT happen?

...used physical force or threats of physical harm to TRY to make you put your penis in their vagina, but it DID NOT happen?

...used physical force or threats of physical harm to TRY to put their penis in your mouth or anus, but it DID NOT happen?"

Breaking the single question into three different ones adds to the judgement burden for men because it essentially forces them to identify specific behaviors they think the perpetrator would have done, instead of simply acknowledging that any one of three possible acts may have occurred (oral, anal, or vaginally made-to-penetrate). For example, one male respondent answered 'yes' to attempted oral sex but 'no' to attempted vaginal sex (forced penetration). Because nothing actually happened, it was impossible for him to know what specific sexual acts his aggressor would have performed had the situation escalated further. He explained, "It was a female friend of mine had another female that she wanted me to talk to. That was my first time meeting her. And she was a big girl. She was a lot bigger than me. And she just got aggressive. Kept telling me how much she like me, how good I looked. And she just kept saying 'you will have sex with me' in a real aggressive way. And I said, 'You gotta go.' Because I wasn't even attracted to her to be honest. And that's what really irritated me. She stood up and said, 'No, you're gonna give me some dick before I leave.' I said if you don't get out, something bad is going to happen. She ended up leaving but she was real forceful. If I wasn't aggressive, I don't know what would've happened." *Did she do anything physical to you?* "She pushed me on the bed. [Laughs.] Like I said, she was bigger than me. She wasn't taller than me, but she was fat." *Why did you choose 'mouth on penis'?* *Did she say she wanted to do that?* "No, she just said she wanted to have sex." *So why not also the 'vaginal' question too?* "My fault. I probably didn't really hear the whole thing. But I should've said 'yes' to that one." In reality the respondent could not have known what specific acts the respondent intended, so he provided one answer (oral sex) that seemed reasonable. But in talking about the experience, he also believed that vaginal sex was also likely and in retrospect should have been included. Had this been one question (similar to the female section), he would not have had to make such specific judgements about someone else's potential behavior.

### 3. Categories in the Relationship Questions

In each topic area – stalking, sexual assault, and attempted assault – respondents are asked the nature of their relationship to the perpetrator at the time of the occurrence. The categories tested were:

Someone I was involved with romantically or sexually <i>at the time</i> .....	1
Someone I <i>previously</i> had been involved with romantically or sexually .....	2
A family member.....	3
A friend or acquaintance (e.g., neighbor, roommate, classmate, etc.).....	4
Someone I knew through work (e.g., co-worker, boss/supervisor, client/customer/patient, etc.) .....	5
A person of authority (e.g., teacher, doctor, police officer, etc.).....	6
Someone I knew less than 24 hours (e.g., taxi driver, someone met at party/bar) .....	7
A complete stranger .....	8
Someone else (Please specify: _____ )	9

In many instances, the categories offered were insufficient and difficult to choose from. This is due in part to timeframe confusion and to the complicated nature of relationships and experiences.

Timeframe Confusion: Some respondents could not keep the timeframe in mind of how they knew the person *at the time of the experience*. One respondent looked at the categories and said, “She was someone I dated.” *So, would that be #1, someone you were involved with romantically or sexually at the time?* “Um-hm.” However, it later emerged that she did these things to him after they had become romantically involved, so the better choice was category 2. Another respondent also got confused about the categories and timeframe. She said, “That was my husband. I met him in college.” The interviewer asked her to choose from the list on the showcard and she said, “Number 4 would apply to him, I met him through a friend.” The correct answer was option 1. A third respondent also got confused between how she met the person versus what her relationship was to the person. She answered category 6 because she met this person while he was on duty as a police officer, but she described him as “Someone that wanted to date me and we was just friends at first.” In this case, categories 1 or 4 might have been more appropriate than 6.

As the previous examples show, when respondents don’t keep the timeframe in mind, the categories are not mutually exclusive because relationships shift over time. One respondent said, “It was someone I met online, a dating website.” *Is there a category here (showed showcard) that you think best fits how you knew the person?* “[Category 8] because I didn’t know them at the time...But the intent was to date...so kind of like 8 and 1.”

The Complex Nature of Relationships: The interaction with another respondent illustrates the difficulty in mapping personal experiences onto the response options because some relationships are not easily categorized. One respondent studied the card and, not finding an obvious answer, tells the interviewer in her own words. She said, “It was a 16-year-old I hired to cut my grass for the summer...I didn’t know it was him...so I guess it would fall under ‘someone else.’” But then during probing she said it was a neighbor. Because she was having difficulty choosing among the options, the interviewer asked what category the respondent might add here to capture her experience. “It was a worker. Someone I hired to work around my house.” *Right. That’s really not category 5, is it?* “It was a neighbor.” *Ok, so a neighbor. That’s under ‘friend or acquaintance.’ Was he doing this before you hired him do you think?* “Yes. I didn’t know who it was at the time. I had the police involved but they couldn’t catch the person.” The respondent ended up going with category 4 because of the word ‘neighbor,’ but it was not easy for her to arrive at this answer because the of the word ‘friend’ in that category. “I guess ‘acquaintance.’ He was a neighbor. I knew him.” She had trouble choosing a category because ‘friend or acquaintance’ was not the way she wanted to convey how she knew this person.



Marriage is another relationship that confused some respondents. One respondent paused when answering. She said, "Let's see. Well...[thinks]." *Do none of those categories quite fit right?* "Yeah." *In your own words, what was your relationship to them?* "My husband." The first category would be the best choice but did not seem adequate. The respondent said, "You might want to put in a question about forced sex during marriage. Because I would think that's probably not too uncommon. I think if you ask specifically about it [marriage] you would get more accurate answers." To this respondent, the first category came across as something outside of marriage, such as dating.

Finally, the category of 'family member' might do better with some examples (such as 'parents or stepparents'). One respondent failed to report sexual assault on the part of her father because she did not specifically see the category and admitted it is not a memory she normally invokes without prompting. Additionally, a category for people who are close to being (but are not quite) family members could be helpful. Several respondents mentioned perpetrators such as a mother's (or aunt's) boyfriend. Both examples were captured in the 'something else' category but including a specific category (such as 'friend of the family') could minimize error or confusion in reporting.

#### 4. Asking About Age

For each topic – stalking, sexual assault, and attempted assault – respondents are asked how old they were when these events happened. Some respondents remembered specifically but others could give only ranges, usually in decades (e.g., 20's or 30's). Respondents who could not remember specific ages often said something like, "Um...I was in my twenties...I wasn't even in my thirties. Yeah. I was in my twenties." Or "Probably early twenties...So maybe 23 or 24...22, 21...somewhere in there." In an online context, it may be helpful to offer ranges for those who cannot report a specific age.

#### 5. Gender Identity Considerations

Gender Minorities may have difficulty with some of the questions. Only one respondent in this sample was a gender minority but their experience demonstrates the complex nature of asking about sexual assault in a way that essentially assumes a binary reality. Their experience is worth discussing at length.

It emerged in the context of the interview that the respondent did not identify as either male or female but rather as non-binary. The interviewer explained how the questionnaire currently contained a women's version (geared toward those with a vagina) and a men's version (geared toward those with a penis) and suggested that the respondent choose one and then see how it worked out. The respondent has had their breasts removed but still has a vagina, so they chose the women's version. This did not feel like exactly the right choice, but they explained, "It would not be correct but probably more relevant based on kind of where I'm at." The women's version did work better than the men's version because the questions only covered "below the belt." However, sexual violence can be missed when questions focus only on genitalia. The respondent said, "I have had situations that were non-consensual, but they are not related to the lower half of my body." This involved unwanted touching of their chest. In addition, even though it did not reflect their personal situation, the respondent pointed out that there are transwomen with a penis. There are also transmen who do not have a vagina but did at one time. And because this questionnaire asks about a lifetime, it would not work for some people to simply try to route them one way or the other based on whether they currently have a vagina or penis. Careful thought will have to be given to determine how respondents who are gender minorities are routed through the NISVS online questionnaire.

## APPENDIX: NISVS Test Instrument Used by Cognitive Interviewers

### SECTION 1

[SHOW CARD 1] First are some detailed questions about times in your life when someone may have repeatedly contacted, followed, or spied on you in a way that made you afraid, concerned for your safety, threatened, or caused emotional suffering. When answering, please think about anyone who may have done these things to you at any time in your life including strangers, a romantic or sexual partner, a family member, a friend, teacher, co-worker or supervisor, or someone you have known briefly. Please DO NOT include bill collectors, telephone solicitors, other sales people, or others following or contacting you as part of their job.

ST01. In your lifetime has anyone ever followed, contacted, tracked, or spied on you in a way that was intentional, unwanted, and made you feel afraid, concerned for your safety, threatened, or caused emotional suffering? Examples of these behaviors might include:

- Physically followed or spied on you
- Approached you or showed up in places
- Used hidden cameras, software, or GPS to track or spy on you
- Sneaked onto your property
- Repeatedly called, emailed, texted you when it was unwanted (do not include spam, robocalls, or telephone solicitors)
- Sent unwanted messages through social media
- Sent unwanted gifts, cards, letters

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No **[GO TO NEXT SECTION]**

ST02. In total, how many DIFFERENT people did any of these things to you **on more than one** occasion?

# of people \_\_\_\_\_

ST03. We would like to learn more about your experience. You said [#] people followed, contacted, or spied on you on more than one occasion. Think about the [first /second/third/etc.] person who ever did those things to you. Was that person male or female?

- ☐ Male

☐ Female

**ST04\_01.** How did you know this person? Please choose a category that best describes how you knew them. **[SHOW CARD 2]**

- Someone I was involved with romantically or sexually *at the time* ..... 1  
Someone I *previously* had been involved with romantically or sexually ..... 2  
A family member..... 3  
A friend or acquaintance (e.g., neighbor, roommate, classmate, etc.)..... 4  
Someone I knew through work (e.g., co-worker, boss/supervisor, client/customer/patient, etc.) ..... 5  
A person of authority (e.g., teacher, doctor, police officer, etc.) ..... 6  
Someone I knew less than 24 hours (e.g., taxi driver, someone met at party/bar) ..... 7  
A complete stranger ..... 8  
Someone else (Please specify: \_\_\_\_\_) 9

**ST05\_.** Still thinking about the [relationship category named in ST04\_01], please answer the following questions. Did this [relationship category named in ST04\_01]....

1. follow you around, watch, or spy on you when you did not want them to?	Yes No
2. approach you or show up in places, such as your home, work, or school when you did not want them to?	Yes No
3. use technology, such as hidden cameras, computer software, apps, or GPS (Global Positioning System) to monitor or track your location without your permission? This includes GPS used in a phone or on social media, such as Facebook. (We are talking about times when you knew or you thought someone was using GPS technology to monitor you.)	Yes No
4. sneak onto your property, such as your home or car, and do things to scare you by letting you know they had been there?	Yes No
5. make unwanted phone calls to you or send you unwanted emails, voice, or text messages? Please do not include bill collectors or telephone solicitors.	Yes No
6. send you unwanted messages through social media, such as Facebook, Instagram, and chat rooms?	Yes No
7. send you cards, letters, flowers, or presents when they knew you didn't want them to?	Yes No

**[If YES to any of 1-7, ask ST05\_8-9; If NO to all, GO TO next perp OR next section.]**

**ST05\_.** Did this [relationship category from ST04\_01]

8. make you feel afraid or concerned for your safety or the safety of others?	Yes No
9. make threats to physically harm you (even if you did not take the threat seriously)?	Yes No

**[If the respondent answered 1 or more people in ST02, AND YES to any of ST05\_1-7 AND YES to either ST05\_8 or 9, ask the next questions. Otherwise, go to next perp OR next section.]**

**ST06:** How old were you the first time [perp 1: fill relationship category named in ST04\_01] did any of these things to you?

Age in years\_\_\_\_\_

**ST07:** Did this [perp 1: fill relationship category named in ST04\_01] do [this/any of these things] within the past 12 months, that is since [FILL: DATE 12 MONTHS AGO]?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

**[IF R reported more than one perp, repeat starting with ST03\_02.]**

## **SECTION 2: UNWANTED SEXUAL EXPERIENCES INVOLVING TECHNOLOGY**

This next question is about unwanted sexual situations that occurred online, through the internet, social media, text message, or email.

**TSV01.** In your lifetime, has anyone ever sent you an unwanted sexually explicit message or image through the internet, social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram), email, or text message without your consent? Please do not include spam messages, phishing attempts, or messages that you think are from a Bot (that is, a computer program that imitates a human).

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

---

## **SECTION 3: PHYSICAL FORCE AND DRUGGED/DRUNK ASSAULT**

**[FOR MEN, SKIP TO MEN'S VERSION]**

### **WOMEN'S VERSION**

**INTRO-W: SHOW CARD 3**

This next section is about in-person sexual contact that you did not consent to and that you did not want to happen.

Some people are threatened with harm or physically forced to have sex or sexual contact when they don't want to. Examples of physical force are being pinned or held down, using violence or threats of violence, or not physically stopping after you said no. To be clear, the next questions are asking only about times in your life when sex was unwanted and you did not give consent.

Sometimes unwanted sex or sexual contact happens when a person is unable to consent to it or stop it from happening because they are too drunk, high, drugged, or passed out from alcohol, drugs, or medications. This can include times when they voluntarily consumed alcohol or drugs or times when they were given alcohol or drugs without their knowledge or consent.

These questions ask about unwanted sexual contact that might have occurred through physical force or during the use of alcohol or drugs. You might or might not have ever been in this type of situation. Please remember that even if someone uses alcohol or drugs, what happens to them is not their fault. These questions use detailed and explicit language so that everyone is clear about what the questions are asking.

**SV01\_W**

In your LIFETIME, how many people have EVER...

a. performed oral sex on you when you did NOT consent to it, and it was not wanted? By oral sex, we mean that someone put their mouth on your vagina.

- ☐ 0, this never happened to me
- ☐ Number of people: \_\_\_\_\_

b. penetrated you by putting their fingers or an object in your vagina or anus when you did NOT consent to it, and it was not wanted?

- ☐ 0, this never happened to me
- ☐ Number of people: \_\_\_\_\_

c. had vaginal sex with you when you did NOT consent to it, and it was not wanted? By vaginal sex, we mean that a male put his penis in your vagina.

- ☐ 0, this never happened to me
- ☐ Number of people: \_\_\_\_\_

d. penetrated you by putting their penis in your mouth or anus when you did NOT consent to it, and it was not wanted?

- ☐ 0, this never happened to me
- ☐ Number of people: \_\_\_\_\_

**[IF '0' TO ALL PREVIOUS QUESTIONS (SV01\_a-d), GO TO NEXT SECTION. OTHERWISE, ASK SV02\_W]**

**SV02\_W**

We would like to learn more about your experience. You said that [# people given in each of SV01\_a-d] had [SV behavior named in SV01\_a-d]. Think about the [person / 1<sup>st</sup> person/2<sup>nd</sup> person] who did this to you. When this happened, did this person...

- a. use physical harm to make you, such as pinning or holding you down, using violence or threats of violence or not stopping after you said no?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

- b. make you engage in sexual activity when were you unable to consent to sex or stop it from happening because you were too drunk, high, drugged, or passed out from alcohol or drugs?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No **[GO TO SV03.W]**

- c. Do you think you were ever given alcohol without your knowledge?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

- d. Do you think you were ever given other drugs without your knowledge?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

**SV03.W**

Was this person...

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

**SV04.W**

Still thinking about the [person / 1<sup>st</sup> person/2<sup>nd</sup> person] who [Individual SV behavior from SV01\_a-d] and [Context(s) given in SV02\_a-b]. Please choose a category that best describes how you knew this person.  
**[SHOW CARD 2]**

Someone I was involved with romantically or sexually <i>at the time</i> .....	1
Someone I <i>previously</i> had been involved with romantically or sexually .....	2
A family member.....	3
A friend or acquaintance (e.g., neighbor, roommate, classmate, etc.).....	4
Someone I knew through work (e.g., co-worker, boss/supervisor, client/customer/patient, etc.) .....	5
A person of authority (e.g., teacher, doctor, police officer, etc.).....	6
Someone I knew less than 24 hours (e.g., taxi driver, someone met at party/bar) .....	7
A complete stranger .....	8
Someone else (Please specify: _____ )	9

**SV05.W** How old were you the FIRST TIME this [Relationship type from SV04] did this to you?

Age in years \_\_\_\_\_

**SV06.W**

Did this [Relationship type from SV04] do this to you in the past 12 months, that is, since [fill date]?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

**[AFTER ALL PERPS HAVE BEEN ASKED ABOUT, ASK SV07.W]**

**SV07.W**

To review, you said that [say all relationship type(s) given in SV04.W] made you engage in sexual activity when [saw what was endorsed in SV02a—b]. In total, how many different people did this/these things to you?

Number of people: \_\_\_\_\_

#### **ATTEMPTED BUT UNSUCCESSFUL ASSAULT – WOMEN: SHOW CARD 4**

The next set of questions are about times in your life when someone ever ATTEMPTED to have sex or sexual contact with you by using physical force or threats of harm but sex did NOT happen. Examples of physical force are being pinned or held down, using violence or threats of violence, or not physically stopping after you said no. To be clear, we are now asking only about times when sex was unwanted and you did not give consent, and sex was attempted but did not happen.

FA01.W

How many people have ever used physical force or threats of physical harm to TRY to put their penis in your vagina, mouth, or anus, but it DID NOT happen?

- ☐ 0, this never happened to me **[END SURVEY]**  
☐ Number of people: \_\_\_\_\_

**[ASK FA05 – FA08 FOR EACH PERPETRATOR]**

**FA05.W**

Was this person / the 1<sup>ST</sup> person...

- ☐ Male  
☐ Female

**FA06.W**

Still thinking about the [person / 1st person] who [Individual SV behavior from FA01]. Please choose a category that best describes how you knew this person. **[SHOW CARD 2]**

- Someone I was involved with romantically or sexually *at the time* ..... 1  
 Someone I *previously* had been involved with romantically or sexually ..... 2  
 A family member..... 3  
 A friend or acquaintance (e.g., neighbor, roommate, classmate, etc.)..... 4  
 Someone I knew through work (e.g., co-worker, boss/supervisor, client/customer/patient, etc.) ..... 5  
 A person of authority (e.g., teacher, doctor, police officer, etc.)..... 6  
 Someone I knew less than 24 hours (e.g., taxi driver, someone met at party/bar) ..... 7  
 A complete stranger ..... 8  
 Someone else (Please specify: \_\_\_\_\_ ) 9

**FA07.W**

How old were you the FIRST TIME this [Relationship type from FA06] did this to you?

Age in years \_\_\_\_\_

**FA08.W**

Did this [Relationship type from FA06] do this to you in the past 12 months, that is, since [fill date]?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

**FA09.W**

To review, you said that [Show relationship type(s) given in FA06] ATTEMPTED to have sex or sexual contact with you by using physical force or threats of harm but sex did NOT happen.

In total, how many different people did this to you?

Number of people: \_\_\_\_\_

**MEN'S VERSION**



### INTRO-M: SHOW CARD 3

This next section is about in-person sexual contact that you did not consent to and that you did not want to happen.

Some people are threatened with harm or physically forced to have sex or sexual contact when they don't want to. Examples of physical force are being pinned or held down, using violence or threats of violence, or not physically stopping after you said no. To be clear, the next questions are asking only about times in your life when sex was unwanted and you did not give consent.

Sometimes unwanted sex or sexual contact happens when a person is unable to consent to it or stop it from happening because they are too drunk, high, drugged, or passed out from alcohol, drugs, or medications. This can include times when they voluntarily consumed alcohol or drugs or times when they were given alcohol or drugs without their knowledge or consent.

These questions ask about unwanted sexual contact that might have occurred through physical force or during the use of alcohol or drugs. You might or might not have ever been in this type of situation. Please remember that even if someone uses alcohol or drugs, what happens to them is not their fault. These questions use detailed and explicit language so that everyone is clear about what the questions are asking.

**SV01\_M\_** In your LIFETIME, how many people have EVER...

- e. penetrated you by putting their fingers or an object in your anus when you did NOT consent to it, and it was not wanted?

- ☐ 0, this never happened to me  
☐ Number of people: \_\_\_\_\_

- f. put their mouth on your penis or make you put your penis in their mouth?

- ☐ 0, this never happened to me  
☐ Number of people: \_\_\_\_\_

- g. made you put your penis in their vagina?

- ☐ 0, this never happened to me  
☐ Number of people: \_\_\_\_\_

- h. put their penis in your mouth or anus?

- ☐ 0, this never happened to me  
☐ Number of people: \_\_\_\_\_

**[IF '0' TO ALL, GO TO NEXT SECTION. OTHERWISE, ASK SV02.M]**

**SV02.M\_** We would like to learn more about your experience. You said that [# people given in each of SV01\_a-d] had [SV behavior named in SV01\_e-h]. Think about the [person / 1<sup>st</sup> person/2<sup>nd</sup> person] who did this to you. When this happened, did this person...

- a. use physical harm to make you, such as pinning or holding you down, using violence or threats of violence or not stopping after you said no?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

- b. make you engage in sexual activity when were you unable to consent to sex or stop it from happening because you were too drunk, high, drugged, or passed out from alcohol or drugs?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No [**SKIP TO SV03.M**]

- c. Do you think you were ever given alcohol without your knowledge?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

- d. Do you think you were ever given other drugs without your knowledge?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

**SV03.M**

Was this person...

- ☐ Male  
☐ Female

**SV04.M**

Still thinking about the [person / 1<sup>st</sup> person/2<sup>nd</sup> person] who [Individual SV behavior from SV01\_e-h] and [Context(s) given in SV02\_a-b]. Please choose a category that best describes how you knew this person.

**[SHOW CARD 2]**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| Someone I was involved with romantically or sexually <i>at the time</i> .....                       | 1 |
| Someone I <i>previously</i> had been involved with romantically or sexually .....                   | 2 |
| A family member.....  | 3 |
| A friend or acquaintance (e.g., neighbor, roommate, classmate, etc.).....                           | 4 |
| Someone I knew through work (e.g., co-worker, boss/supervisor, client/customer/patient, etc.) ..... | 5 |
| A person of authority (e.g., teacher, doctor, police officer, etc.).....                            | 6 |
| Someone I knew less than 24 hours (e.g., taxi driver, someone met at party/bar) .....               | 7 |
| A complete stranger .....   | 8 |
| Someone else (Please specify: _____ )   | 9 |

**SV05.M** How old were you the FIRST TIME this [Relationship type from SV04] did this to you?

Age in years \_\_\_\_\_

**SV06.M**

Did this [Relationship type from SV04] do this to you in the past 12 months, that is, since [fill date]?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

**[REPEAT SV03 – SV06 FOR EACH PERP/BEHAVIOR. THEN ASK SV07.M]**

**SV07.M**

To review, you said that [Show relationship type(s) given in SV04] made you engage in sexual activity when [show what was endorsed in SV02a—b]. In total, how many different people did this/these things to you?

Number of people: \_\_\_\_\_

---

**ATTEMPTED BUT UNSUCCESSFUL ASSAULT – MEN: SHOW CARD 4**

The next set of questions are about times in your life when someone ever ATTEMPTED to have sex or sexual contact with you by using physical force or threats of harm but sex did NOT happen. Examples of physical force are being pinned or held down, using violence or threats of violence, or not physically stopping after you said no. To be clear, we are now asking only about times when sex was unwanted and you did not give consent, and sex was attempted but did not happen. In your lifetime, how many people have EVER...

FA02.M used physical force or threats of physical harm to TRY to put their mouth on your penis, or TRY to make you put your penis in their mouth, but it DID NOT happen?

- ☐ 0, this never happened to me  
☐ Number of people: \_\_\_\_\_

FA03.M used physical force or threats of physical harm to TRY to make you put your penis in their vagina, but it DID NOT happen?

- ☐ 0, this never happened to me  
☐ Number of people: \_\_\_\_\_

FA04.M used physical force or threats of physical harm to TRY to put their penis in your mouth or anus, but it DID NOT happen?

- ☐ 0, this never happened to me  
☐ Number of people: \_\_\_\_\_

**[ASK NEXT QUESTION (FA05 – FA09) FOR EACH PERP; IF ZERO TO ALL, END SURVEY]**

**FA05.M**

We would like to learn more about your experience. You said [#] person/people [fill behavior from FA02 – FA04]. Think about the [person/1<sup>st</sup> person/2<sup>nd</sup> person] who did that to you. Was this person...

- ☐ Male  
☐ Female

**FA06.M**

Still thinking about the [person / 1st person] who [Individual SV behavior from FA02-FA04]. Please choose a category that best describes how you knew this person. **[SHOW CARD 2]**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| Someone I was involved with romantically or sexually <i>at the time</i> .....                       | 1 |
| Someone I <i>previously</i> had been involved with romantically or sexually .....                   | 2 |
| A family member.....  | 3 |
| A friend or acquaintance (e.g., neighbor, roommate, classmate, etc.).....                           | 4 |
| Someone I knew through work (e.g., co-worker, boss/supervisor, client/customer/patient, etc.) ..... | 5 |
| A person of authority (e.g., teacher, doctor, police officer, etc.).....                            | 6 |
| Someone I knew less than 24 hours (e.g., taxi driver, someone met at party/bar) .....               | 7 |
| A complete stranger .....   | 8 |
| Someone else (Please specify: _____ )   | 9 |

**FA07.M**

How old were you the FIRST TIME this [Relationship type from FA06] did this to you?

Age in years \_\_\_\_\_

**FA08.M**

Did this [Relationship type from FA06] do this to you in the past 12 months, that is, since [fill date]?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

**[REPEAT FA05 – FA08 FOR EACH PERP. AFTER ALL PERPS ARE ASKED, GO TO FA09]**

**FA09.M**

To review, you said that [say all relationship type(s) given in FA06] ATTEMPTED to have sex or sexual contact with you [say all that was endorsed in FA02—FA04] by using physical force or threats of harm but sex did NOT happen.

In total, how many different people did this to you?

Number of people: \_\_\_\_\_